



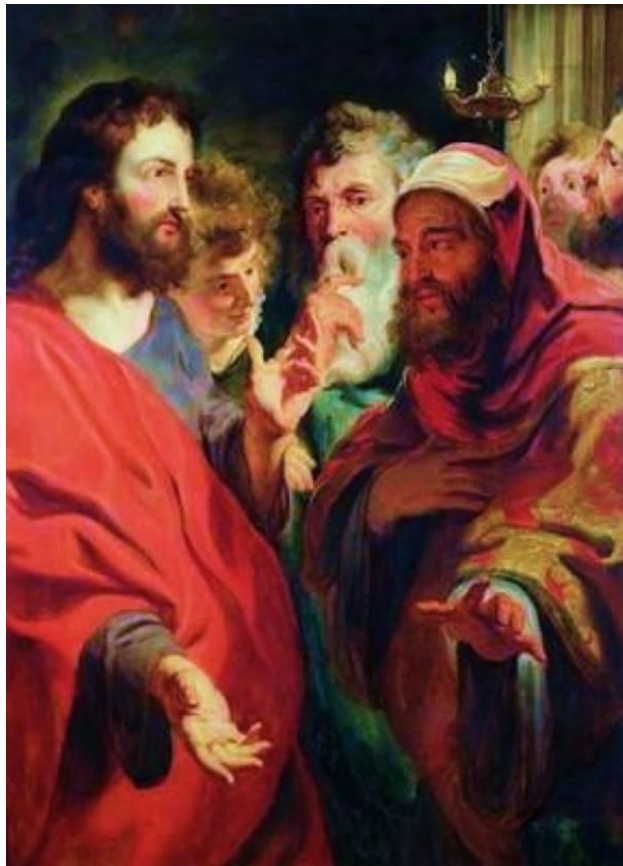
Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

7th Sunday of Easter | Year C



17th Century. Jacob Jordaens.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer

God of mercy,

You wash away our sins in water,

You give us new birth in the Spirit,

And redeem us in the blood of Christ.

As we celebrate Christ's resurrection

Increase our awareness of these blessings,

And renew your gift of life within us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

One God forever and ever.

[Second Sunday of Easter, Morning Prayer, Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours, ICEL, Catholic Book, New York, 452]

**Catholic
Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ The entire Easter season is a remembrance made present of Christ's Paschal Mystery—the life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of Christ's Spirit to the world. An entire season is set aside for this reflection.
- ▶ Today's liturgy (as all the liturgies of the Easter season) remind us that we are all called to embrace a life of self-sacrificing discipleship.
- ▶ Jesus prayed for the unity of his followers. That prayer is as necessary today as it was for that first fledgling community. Unity is the key to evangelization. The Christian Church spread across the known world because of the love and unity of its members and because of the power and dynamism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed that his disciples would be one. We should all strive to fulfill Jesus' prayer and dream for us in our walk with Christ today.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading: Acts of the Apostles: 7:55-60

- ▶ Stephen and his other six cohorts were appointed to minister to the needs of the Hellenist members of the community, particularly the widows and orphans.
- ▶ The seven ministers preached the Good News and performed healing works in the area of Samaria and Gaza.
- ▶ As a result of their evangelization efforts the Jewish Sanhedrin had Steven stoned, thus giving him the distinction of Christianity's first martyr.
- ▶ Stephen reiterated salvation history and chastised Israel for the way in which it was unfaithful to the covenant with God. He told the people that Israel had rejected the teaching of Moses, the prophets and Christ.
- ▶ The parallels between Jesus and Steven's death are striking. Both men were innocent. Both men were convicted on bogus charges secured by bribery. Jesus and Steven forgave their executioners and both offered their spirits at the end of their lives.
- ▶ Steven is an icon for today's Christian; he reminds us what it means to be a disciple. When one embraces the Paschal Mystery of Jesus one commits to offering one's life for the sake of the Gospel.
- ▶ Steven's death was a sign that God's judgment in the last age was already underway as evidenced by the disciple's call to embrace the cross and resurrection of Jesus.
- ▶ Steven enjoyed the beatific vision as a result of his supreme sacrifice.
- ▶ Steven did not exhort the people to repentance as their hearts were already too harden to hear such a message. He did, however, pray for their redemption.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How is this reading a word for you today?
- ▶ It is a sobering thought to think that Steven did not invite the people to repent, as they were already too closed and hard-hearted to hear such a message. What is the lesson in that for us today? Is there evidence today of an arrogant closed-mindedness when it comes to faith? Have you ever experienced it and if so how did it impact you?
- ▶ Can you imagine a scenario in which you might be called upon to embrace the Paschal Mystery as Steven did?
- ▶ What is the good news in this reading?

Second Reading: Revelation 22: 12-14, 17-17, 20

- ▶ Today’s reading looks forward to Christ’s return. Echoes of Advent are heard throughout the proclamation.
- ▶ Jesus is present to us in the liturgy as we await his final return. He is present and reigns from his heavenly throne even though he is absent from us in this earthly realm.
- ▶ The early community eagerly awaited Jesus’ return. There is a sense of expectancy flowing from the persecution they endured for the sake of the kingdom.
- ▶ The early disciples had to make adjustments in light of Jesus’ postponed return. They waited with watchful anticipation for the future coming as they proclaimed and established the reign of God in their midst.
- ▶ We are called to be similarly diligent as we await the coming of the Bridegroom who comes to take his spouse the Church home to the new and heavenly city.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ We usually reflect on the dynamic of waiting during Advent. However, today’s liturgy invites us to take a brief respite and once again consider what it means to wait for the Lord’s return. It is easy to imagine how the early church longed for Christ’s immediate return. If the Lord were to return tomorrow, would you be ready? What would you have left to do? What are the implications?

Gospel: John 17:20-26

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ Today's Gospel gives us an intimate look into Jesus' interior prayer life. Jesus prays for his disciples. Jesus prays for the unity of his disciples. Jesus prays that his followers know the same intimacy with his Father that Jesus experiences.
- ▶ The reason for Jesus' prayer is so the world will come to belief in him whom the Father sent to save the world. Jesus prays so the world will come to belief that the Father sent him to the world.
- ▶ John's community was to go forth and evangelize the world. People would come to belief in Christ through the love witnessed in the community. The community itself stood as witness to God's salvific work.
- ▶ The unity Jesus prayed for would be accomplished in and through the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ The "glory" Jesus was given by his Father and which he passes on to his disciples is translated "presence".
- ▶ John uses a literary Hebrew device to emphasize the certainty of God's action. Jesus said, "I have given them." The reference to a future event as having already taken place is akin to stressing the certainty of the future act being accomplished.
- ▶ It is possible that John's Jesus prays for unity perhaps in response to a lack of unity present in the Johannine community. More importantly, however, is Jesus' intent in this Gospel is to demonstrate the unique, intimate, covenant relationship between himself and his Father.
- ▶ Jesus draws us into his father's intimacy as he leads us as his own.
- ▶ Jesus chose, strengthened and continues to strengthen and empower his disciples (the Church).
- ▶ The eschatological promise in today's Gospel reminds believers that faithfulness, perseverance and endurance in face of persecution and life's challenges will result in life everlasting with Christ.
- ▶ In his final discourse Jesus prepares his followers for his absence. He reminds them he will send the Paraclete—the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ The word *paraclete* was a juridical term similar in meaning to the word advocate or prosecuting attorney. Disciples need not fear, as the Spirit will be present to plead their case, advocate on their behalf and guide and lead them through the peaks and valleys of life.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What does it mean to you when the Gospel invites you to share Jesus intimacy with his Father? In what way, if any, have you ever shared in that intimacy?
- ▶ Why is unity in the community/Church an important value? What happens when it is not present—what are the implications? What can you/we do to foster such unity? What are some obstacles to unity?
- ▶ There is an inherent call to mission and evangelization in this Gospel. What is the primary vehicle for this evangelization? What is the most effective tool of evangelization according to the perspective of this Gospel? What are the implications for your community today?
- ▶ The early church developed grew and developed in relation to the reciprocal love they showed to one another. What evidence is there in your community of love that flows from the Father, through Christ out to one another? Could people say of your community, “See how they love one another?”
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today’s liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God’s call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. I can imagine a scenario in which I could be called upon to embrace the Paschal Mystery---that is suffer for the sake of the Gospel—even in today’s society that allows me the freedom to worship as I please. I can imagine standing before courts having to defend my self for speaking a word of truth to power, perhaps for calling for a non-violent approach to our world’s enemies. I can imagine being called a traitor for such an action. I can certainly imagine it, but I doubt I will ever have to face such a threat.

What is more reasonable to expect is the challenge the Gospel asks of me--to be a voice for the voiceless in my own neighborhood. I once presented a teaching on social sin and Pope John Paul’s exhortation that we address it at its core. One of the participants accused me of being anti-American for suggesting that we be more compassionate and equitable in dealing with the illegal immigrant issue in this country. The man castigated me for suggesting that we do not treat such folks humanely. This very active Catholic insisted that they receive exactly what they deserve because in his words, “they are criminals.”

His anger, angst and reporting to the pastor was a small price to pay for defending the Gospel, but it is in those small ways that God calls us to be faithful. I probably will never have to worry about being stoned to death. I will no doubt experience criticism, gossip and unfavorable comments when I do try to stand up for what Jesus and others who would follow gave their lives for.

#2. If Jesus were to return tomorrow I would want to make sure that I had not left any unresolved reconciliation issues undone. Jesus’ ministry was primarily a reconciling ministry. I would want to make sure my children understand how much I love them. I would want to share the love of Christ with them one last time. I would want to reach out to friends and family members who were yet asleep to the fire of God’s love in their lives and walk with them over that last portal.

I was privileged to walk that walk with my mother. To walk with someone you know is ready to make that final crossing from the portal of this world to the next is an awe-filled privilege. She knew her hours were coming to an end. She died with the Lord’s love in her heart and on her lips. She offered every belabored breath in God’s honor and in peace handed over her spirit to the Lord’s care. There were no trumpet blasts or fanfare to accompany her passing. There was, however, the peace that passes all understanding—peace that comes from a well-lived life---a life committed to faithful discipleship. That is how I would want my last hours on earth to be—peace-filled assurance of God’s love to carry me over into God’s loving, eternal embrace. For that I gladly would wait a lifetime.

3. Jesus came to show us the face of his Father. St. Paul invites us to consider life as participation in Christ’s life that is ongoing within us and around us. Sometimes we look beyond the ordinary to the profound and the extraordinary. While God’s manifestation

to us is certainly extraordinary, it is also very much a part of the fabric of daily life. The most intimate moments I have shared with God in Christ have been the most ordinary moments such as the times when driving my car I suddenly become conscious of the prayer going on within me and enter into communion with it, or when I experience the pious prayer of an elderly woman who has offered a life of faithful service to her God and to her frail husband as the two sit side by side, holding hands in the midst of the Sunday assembly. Or in the backyard of our home on a beautiful Sunday afternoon as I watch my precious granddaughter reach down and give her puppy a kiss and marvel at the simple pleasures of God's creation.

Each morning I drive to work I am privileged to encounter the intimate presence of God in Christ in the power, majesty and might of the morning ocean waves and glistening sun that reveals glimmers of divine light on the ocean horizon.

Above all, the most intimate moments between the God in Christ and his beloved daughter have occurred in the miracle of life I have been privileged to share with him in giving birth to my four children. I need look no further than my own daily life to experience intimate union with God in Christ.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Prayer
Trinity
The Church and Ecclesiology
Holy Spirit
Sacraments

Salvation
Church Structure
Revelation I or II
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

PRAYER

Jesus invites us deeply into the intimacy he shares with his Father. He prays that we might enter more deeply into union with his Father. Prayer was the hallmark of Jesus' life and he invites us into its power and purpose. Thus, today we will explore the doctrinal theme of PRAYER.

TRINITY

Jesus leads us deeply into the communion of love he shares with his Father. He promises presence in absence which is accomplished through the power of his Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us a glimpse of the union of the Triune God in his final discourse in John's Gospel. Thus, today we will explore the doctrine of the Trinity.

CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY

Jesus invites his disciples into union with his Father and with one another. He promises to be with the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Steven, the first martyr in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles reminds us what it means to be a disciple--- what it means to be church. To be a disciple, to live as Church, means we are to embrace the paschal mystery of Christ. Thus, today the doctrinal focus will be the Church and Ecclesiology.

HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus reminds his disciples that he will send the Paraclete in his absence. His Spirit will guide and strengthen the disciples and the Christian community after Jesus' death. Thus, today, the doctrinal focus will be the Holy Spirit.

SACRAMENTS

Jesus is present to us in the sacraments. Jesus promises presence and intimate union with his Father in today's Gospel from John. That presence and union continues through the generations in the sacraments. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SACRAMENTS.

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

We are saved by God's love [Gospel] and we are saved by God's presence to us through the joys and the sorrows of our lives. The vehicle for that saving grace is Baptism. Easter season is a good time to reflect on the Holy Spirit who has been given to us in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, the sacraments of initiation—the sacraments that make present the paschal mystery of Christ. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to be with the Church in his absence. That presence is manifest to us most particularly in the sacraments of initiation. Thus today we will focus our attention on BAPTISM.

SALVATION

Easter is a time we meditate upon the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation accomplished through the Paschal Mystery of Christ. John's Gospel reminds us that the Father sent his Son to save the world. Jesus' leaves us his ongoing plan of salvation when he tells his disciples that he will send the Paraclete to be with us in his absence. Thus, today we will focus on the doctrinal teaching regarding SALVATION.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

Jesus tells us he will send the Paraclete to be with the Church in his absence. Throughout the Easter season the Acts of the Apostles relates the story of the development of the fledgling Church. It logically flows that today's liturgy invites further reflection on the CHURCH. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of CHURCH and its STRUCTURE.

REVELATION Part I or II

What better time is there than Easter season to focus our attention on God's revelation to humanity? The second reading particularly focuses on God's revelation. Today's session will focus on God's revelation.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Easter is to the year what Sunday is to the week. Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.